

7 Habits Action Guide

Do you know that over 25 million people around the world have purchased copies of Stephen Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People"? That's a lot. Covey's message seems to resonate across various ages and cultures. In the next few pages, we will try to highlight its most powerful points and, perhaps, motivate you to read the book. You can buy a slightly used copy online for about \$12.00.

At the Zenie Foundation we use Covey's framework to support our mission of "Helping Students Become Effective Adults." This brief paper highlights Covey's key message. The graphic on page 2 is a simplified version of Covey's; The Seven Habits Paradigm. We'll call our version the 7 Habits Framework.

The framework highlights two things.

1. The 7 Habits are a pathway toward effectiveness not just a list of 7 tasks. Think of it as our Yellow Brick Road (see ZF's [High School to College Transition Guide HSCT](#)).
2. There are 3 key milestones along the way; Dependence, Independence and Interdependence. We are born totally dependent on our parents and, as we develop, we seek independence. Then Covey introduces the power of interdependence and how it can magnify our effectiveness and our value by moving the focus from "I" to "We".

The first three habits are personal development skills while the next three help develop interpersonal skills. Effective leaders, we believe, have developed strong interpersonal skills. And Habit 7 reminds us of lifelong learning by continuously working to develop and improve our skills.

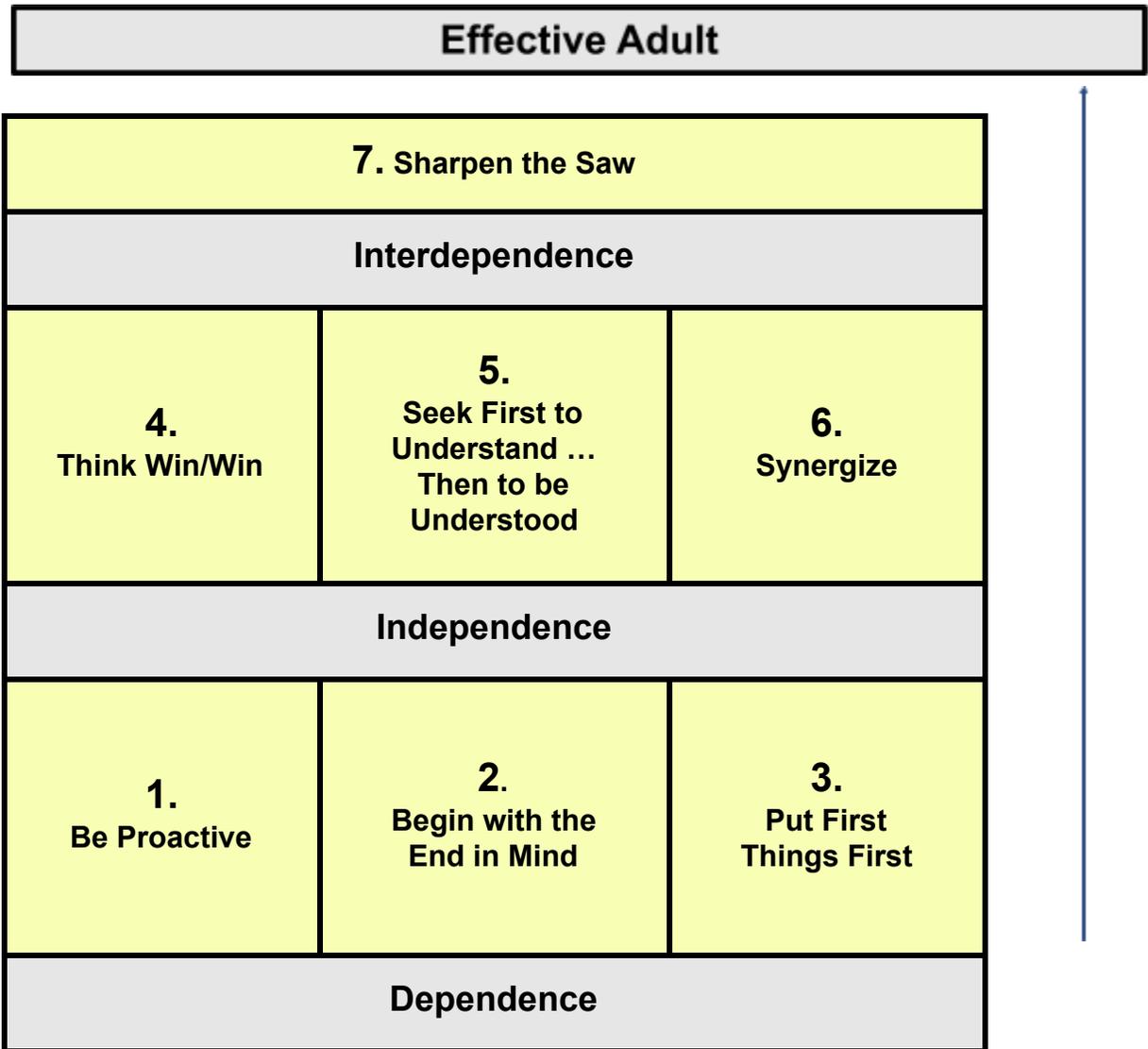
Please also note that we think of formal education as primarily acquiring knowledge while the 7 Habits are skills, to help us apply our knowledge more effectively.

**Knowledge is simply a resource.
Applying knowledge requires skills and purpose.
The 7 Habits are essential skills to effectively apply our knowledge.
It's not what we know, it's what we do:
How we live, defines who we are.**

We can see this by observing great athletes; they have coaches and continually practice to maintain and improve their skills. Virtually everything we do in our life is an opportunity to develop our 7 Habit skills. If we're self-aware and intellectually honest, we will learn from our mistakes as well as successes.

Covey defines "Habit" as the intersection of knowledge, skills and desire. The knowledge of what to do and why, the skills to do it, followed by the desire to do it. Our habits dictate how we live and define who we are. Effective habits create effective people.

7 Habits Framework



The 7 Habits

1. **Be Proactive** – Covey explains that this is more than taking initiative, it's being responsible for our lives. Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. He reminds us responsibility (response-ability) is our freedom to choose our responses.

The alternative is to become reactive where other people or external events take control of us. To become effective, we must define ourselves and take responsibility for our lives.

2. **Begin with the End in Mind** – Covey introduces the concept that everything is created twice – a mental creation followed by a physical creation. Building a house, for example, starts with detailed drawings and specifications before actual construction begins and then you build to the plan.

Longer-term visions are less clear, particularly for young adults setting career and life goals. They will adjust their end vision as they gain new insights about themselves, the world around them and career and life alternatives.

Frank Zenie, co-founder of Zenie Foundation, teaches that the key to personal and organizational success is: Vision > Culture > Execution. Vision is identical to Covey's Begin with the End in Mind. Culture is the personal and organizational values that build trust and is anchored in win/win values which is Habit 4. Execution is the process of actually doing and it combines Habit 1 (Be Proactive) and Habit 3 (Put First Things First).

As individuals seeking effective lives, we should draft our personal mission along with its underlying logic. Then adjust to new insights. Keep the history for later reflection.

3. **Put First Things First** – This habit guides the actual doing or execution of our vision. It focuses on self-management that, in turn, requires self-awareness. It's the ability to act rather than be acted on. Time is our limited resource and we must learn to ignore distractions and work on the high priority tasks needed to achieve our goals. Beware of friends who workload you and learn how to say no.

Habits 1, 2 and 3, guide us from Dependency (Milestone 1) to Independence (Milestone 2) and prepare us for the even greater challenge, Interdependence (Milestone 3), on our journey to becoming effective adults. We like our independence so why should we share it with others? Because we become more valuable and effective by combining our skills with others.

Frank Zenie defines Leadership as, motivating people to do what you want them to do, because it's in THEIR best interest to do so. Manipulation, on the other hand, is motivating people to do what you want because it's in YOUR best interest. Leadership begins with an energizing vision that motivates others to work toward it. Effective leaders embrace interdependence and always seek Win/Win paths.

4. **Think Win/Win** – Win/Win means that agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial and satisfying. Win/Win people become natural leaders because everyone benefits from their actions. If you don't see a Win/Win alternative right away, keep looking.

Character anchors Win/Win leadership and is built on personal integrity, maturity and abundance mentality - Win/Win leaders seek to make "pies" bigger for more to share rather than compete over portions of a smaller pie.

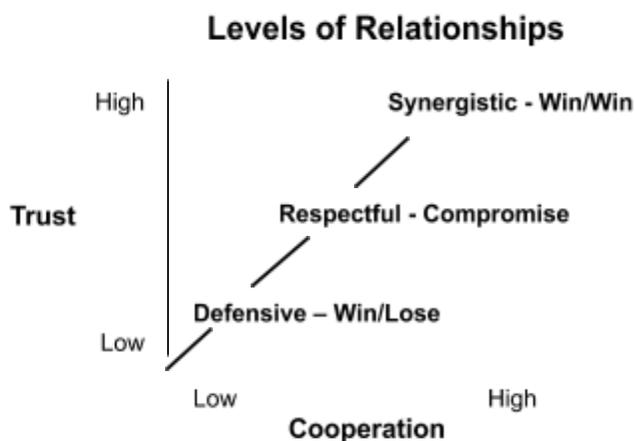
5. **Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood** – Covey believes that communication is the most important life skill and that empathetic listening is the cornerstone. Using a medical metaphor, you want your doctor to DIAGNOSE your illness before he/she

PRESCRIBES the medicine to cure your illness. Leaders know how to discover people's needs in order to formulate Win/Win ideas.

One very effective listening technique is asking discovery questions; often open-ended question like "What are your concerns about ____?" followed by clarifying questions as you seek deeper understanding of the initial replies.

6. **Synergize** – Synergy or Creative Cooperation unleashes the power of Interdependence. We all possess different skill sets and experiences; together we can become more effective than the sum of individual skills. To successfully do this, each person must commit to the group, team, family ... to seek the best outcome. The first five Habits are key skills to synergize.

Covey provides a simple graphic to illustrate this. High levels of Trust and Cooperation lead to Win/Win outcomes.



The skills developed through Habits 1 through 6 enable Interdependence leading to even greater effectiveness.

7. **Sharpen the Saw** – Habits are skills and skills need to be learned, developed and constantly renewed. It's often said that you never forget how to ride a bike. True, but if you haven't ridden your bike recently your finer skills have eroded and aren't ready for challenges and emergencies. For example, you may not be able to "pop a wheelie" if you haven't ridden a bike for a while.

Please think of this 7 Habits Action Guide as part of your Life Vision. It's not intended to be a detailed manual or reference. It's a brief overview of a path to effectiveness. Through it, you can visualize a direct path to fulfilling your personal potential. Remember, these Habits are skills that need to be acquired and highly developed. Following your Yellow Brick Road is not an academic exercise, it's pragmatic, learn by doing. Think in terms of:

Observe Life > Read > Practice, Practice & Practice

And there's lots of help available. It's not complicated, but it's hard and requires commitment. If becoming an Effective Person is part of your personal vision, this Action Guide reminds us of the fundamentals and why it's worth developing the skills needed to become highly effective.